

Evolution in Europe: Lending a Freer Ear

Moscow Lays Out Terms for Baltics

By BILL KELLER

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MOSCOW, June 12 — President Mikhail S. Gorbachev met with the Presidents of the three Baltic republics today and laid out terms that he said could lead to negotiations on Baltic independence and to an end to economic sanctions against Lithuania, the Baltic leaders said.

The Soviet leader also called for the creation of a new Soviet federation that he said would treat all republics as "sovereign states" with virtually as much control over their own affairs as they wanted.

In an intense afternoon of domestic diplomacy, Mr. Gorbachev seemed to be racing to catch up with runaway sovereignty movements that have threatened the Kremlin's control over many of its 15 republics, including the largest and most powerful, the Russian federation.

Russian Sovereignty Move

The Russian Parliament, led by Mr. Gorbachev's insurgent rival, Boris N. Yeltsin, overwhelmingly adopted a statement of sovereignty today that included the assertion that Russian law was to take priority over federal laws.

The measure is not binding and some supporters said the divided Parliament may be less bold when it comes to a specific conflict with the central Government, but it is at least a striking symbol of the forces tearing at Mr. Gorbachev's union.

Mr. Gorbachev's growing discomfort was evident on Monday, when he sent a senior assistant to the Russian Parliament to deny rumors that the Soviet leader had squelched a television interview with Mr. Yeltsin. The accusation unleashed an indignant storm in the Russian Parliament, including complaints that Mr. Gorbachev's wife gets more television exposure than Mr. Gorbachev's political rivals.

Today, Baltic officials speculated that one factor prodding Mr. Gorbachev toward conciliation was the growing sentiment for greater autonomy in

the largest and most populous republic, the Russian federation.

Mr. Yeltsin, for example, has offered to circumvent Mr. Gorbachev by forging direct trade links with the Baltic republics, selling Russian oil for Baltic meat and consumer goods.

Winning Over Skeptics?

Tonight, two of the most skeptical participants in the day's talks on the unstable union, the presidents of Lithuania and Latvia, emerged from their meeting with Mr. Gorbachev glowing with apparent good humor.

President Vytautas Landsbergis of Lithuania declined to spell out Mr. Gorbachev's conditions before presenting them to his Parliament, which he said he would do on Wednesday. But the

Gorbachev's stance encourages Lithuania.

Lithuanian leader hinted strongly that the two sides had made significant headway toward ending the partial economic embargo imposed nearly two months ago.

"I'm afraid that nothing will change tomorrow," he said tonight of the cutoff of oil, natural gas and industrial raw materials. "But the day after tomorrow, we'll see."

"Landsbergis feels that we are coming closer to negotiations," Rita Dapkus, a government spokeswoman, said late tonight after Mr. Landsbergis returned to his republic. "This is the first time I have heard him sounding optimistic about the way things are going with Moscow."

Lithuania has offered to put a moratorium during the period of negotia-

tions on all actions taken since its declaration of independence March 11. This would mean suspending laws exempting Lithuanian men from the Soviet draft, expropriating property claimed by the Soviet Government, and requiring that Lithuanian citizens give up their Soviet citizenship, among other acts that have upset Moscow.

Softening, With a Warning

Mr. Gorbachev today appeared amenable to the general terms of Lithuania's offer. In an appearance before the Soviet Legislature, he said that while he would ultimately like to see Lithuania's independence act repealed, he would settle for suspending "the action" of the independence declaration, "even if it is only for the time of negotiations."

"I believe that if the action of the act of state independence passed by the Lithuanian republic is suspended, we can start talking," he said.

At the same time, Mr. Gorbachev warned that he was willing to employ "other means" if political compromise failed.

"If life demands that, then that's life," he said.

Landsbergis Enthusiastic

Mr. Landsbergis was surprisingly enthusiastic about Mr. Gorbachev's ideas for remaking the Soviet Union, which he described as having "elements of a federation, elements of a confederation."

The Lithuanian leader said his republic might even be willing to participate — "from the side, as it were" — in working out the details of such a new relationship.

"The possibility of such a future union in Eastern Europe would be appropriate from their side and from the side of the independent states that have a right to decide their futures," he said.

Anatolijs Gorbunovs, the President of Latvia, said Mr. Gorbachev had offered to begin negotiations on that republic's transition to independence if the republic froze its step-by-step declaration of independence, passed on



Associated Press

The Presidents of the Baltic republics met yesterday with President Mikhail S. Gorbachev to lay out terms for negotiations on independence. Outside the

Latvian mission in Moscow were, from left: Arnold Ruutel of Estonia, Vytautas Landsbergis of Lithuania and Anatolijs Gorbunovs of Latvia.

May 4.

The Latvian leader said he would present this proposed bargain to the Latvian Legislature on Wednesday.

"If the reaction is positive, then, as President Gorbachev said, negotiations can begin right away," Mr. Gorbunovs told a news conference tonight.

The President of Estonia, Arnold Ruutel, left for his republic tonight before he could be reached for comment.

Mr. Gorbachev has promised for many months to redraw the basic rules of the Soviet federation. During a five-hour meeting with the Presidents of all Soviet republics this afternoon, Mr. Gorbachev spelled out his concept and invited the republics themselves to help draft a new "treaty" on the federal relationship.

"Participants in the meeting spoke about the urgent need to work out and

conclude a new union treaty, which will guarantee the actual economic and political sovereignty of the union republics and their effective interaction," the official Tass press agency said tonight.

Tass said the main cement holding the union together would be "equitable and mutually beneficial economic relations, emerging as the result of transition to a market economy."